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Central Intelligence Agency

DATE 86/06/24DOC NO SOV M 86-20053XOCR 3P&PD 1

Washington, D.C. 20505

## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

20 June 1986

## Moscow's Stake in the Berlin Access Challenge

Summary

The Soviets have exploited, in our judgment, the GDR's challenge to Western access to Berlin even though they apparently did not initiate it. We have little direct evidence on Moscow's role. But its timing, the diversion of attention from recent Soviet setbacks in Chernobyl and Libya, and the fit with the Soviets' objectives in both their German and overall European policies, suggest to us that Moscow gave the East Germans a contingent go ahead for a challenge to Berlin access rights. By giving the GDR the green light, the Soviets probably also hoped to avoid Soviet-East German friction and to compensate the GDR somewhat for Gorbachev's evident refusal to let Honecker visit Bonn this year. We believe Soviet willingness to "intercede" with the East Germans to modify some of the proposed control measures was intended to seize the high ground of reasonable compromise and portray the three NATO occupying powers as being inflexible. Moscow probably views the episode as a pointed reminder to the US, the FRG in particular, and the West generally, of Western vulnerability to Eastern probes.

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Background

1. The Soviets have traditionally welcomed, if they have not initiated, GDR probes to erode Allied rights in Berlin granted in wartime and immediate postwar agreements, as well as under the Quadripartite Agreement (QA) of 1971. Nevertheless, they have customarily avoided letting events approach a crisis.

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**Note:** This memorandum was prepared in the Office of Soviet Analysis. This is a speculative piece, based on only limited evidence, and represents views that have not been coordinated by other analysts in the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to Chief, European Assessments Division,

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2. The current challenge to Western rights on Berlin began on 21 May when the East Germans announced that as of 26 May accredited diplomats crossing to and from West Berlin would have to present their passports instead of identity documents ("red cards") from the GDR Foreign Ministry. All diplomats not accredited to the GDR entering East Berlin after the 26th would have to have an East German visa unless there is a prior agreement they were not needed. Ambiguous wording in the GDR announcement left open the possibility that the three Western-power military missions in West Berlin and their embassies in East Berlin would be exempt from the new controls. On 23 May, in response to a US demarche, a Soviet spokesman noted that "military administrations" would not be affected. [redacted]

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3. The new controls went into effect on the 26th. Western military mission access was not affected and US, British, and French diplomats accredited to the GDR were allowed to cross sector boundaries in Berlin using "red cards." They were warned, however, that they would have to show passports in the near future. All other diplomats were turned back unless they showed passports. On the 29th the East Germans formally exempted US, UK, and French officials stationed in both East and West Berlin from the new passport controls. To avoid showing passports at Berlin sector crossings, "non-exempt" NATO diplomats began to take circuitous routes through recognized East German territory to enter East Berlin. The Soviets stated that they had interceded with the East Germans to the extent they were able and that the GDR was competent to decide the documentation it required for travel into East Berlin. [redacted]

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4. On 7 June, in a major retreat, the East German foreign ministry announced that it would issue new "forgery proof" diplomatic ID cards to replace the "red cards." The East Germans said they would drop the passport requirements. The East German announcement, however, did not explicitly rescind the visa requirement for Allied officials other than US, British, or French traveling from West Berlin--most notably from military missions and consulates accredited to the Allies there. Recently the East Germans allowed military officers from Denmark and Belgium to cross sector points without visas, suggesting they will also compromise on these remaining controls. The GDR announcement, however, continued to refer to the sector crossing sites as "border crossing points," upholding the East German view that East Berlin is part of the GDR rather than part of a greater Berlin subject to the QA. [redacted]

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5. We do not yet have sufficient evidence in hand to reconstruct Soviet-East German handling of the Berlin access challenge. Privately, representatives from both countries provided the disingenuous explanation that the new controls were only an effort to meet Western concerns about terrorists crossing between the sectors. It is more likely that the GDR seized the opportunity offered by the bombing and intense US pressure regarding Libyan activities in East Berlin to assert its long-claimed sovereign right to demand formal travel documentation at the Berlin crossing points. We believe the East Germans received approval for a challenge during talks between Gorbachev and Honecker during the latter's visit to East Berlin in late April. We also believe that the decision to act on the access question became increasingly attractive in both Moscow and East Berlin because of their growing isolation on the terrorist issue as West European states took action against the Libyan People's Bureaux. [redacted]

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#### Moscow and the Germanies

6. [redacted]

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[redacted]

Embassy [redacted] reporting [redacted] also indicate a growing sense of East German assertiveness in the Bloc which the Soviets themselves have inadvertently fed with public praise of Honecker's economic policy. East German self-congratulation reached a new peak at the April East German Communist (SED) Party Congress, which Gorbachev attended. [redacted]

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7. Gorbachev's presence exhibited Moscow's strong support for Honecker and the East German "model." Nevertheless, Gorbachev's harsh public criticism of the FRG at the Party Congress suggests he also carried the deflating message that the Soviets had decided not to permit a Honecker visit to Bonn this year. Such a message would have deprived Honecker's regime of a politically important gain and would have diminished the impact of Gorbachev's visit to the GDR. Further, by implication, Gorbachev's criticism of the FRG suggested that Honecker, whose criticism had been much milder, had been too friendly with the other Germany. By pushing the new controls, the East Germans may have hoped to convince Moscow that they too could be hard on Kohl. [redacted]

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8. To placate ruffled East German feelings, we speculate that the Soviets probably gave Honecker the green light to push for recognition of sovereignty by the West at a traditional pressure point--West Berlin--even though Moscow was not going to take the lead. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] A general discussion, however, would fit well with Gorbachev's new leadership style in Eastern Europe which combines firmness in laying down markers in face-to-face bilaterals with Soviet restraint on micromanagement of detail. He probably also told Honecker that, while the Soviets would rhetorically support the GDR, they wanted no crisis in Berlin that could call into question their own privileges under the QA. The implication would have been that the GDR would have to take the political consequences of its action. [REDACTED]

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9. Moscow probably also saw the GDR challenge as a chance to create mischief for the Kohl government. The Soviets had already stiffened their criticism of Kohl for support of SDI and the US binary chemical weapons program. They undoubtedly welcomed a new opportunity to embarrass him by underscoring West Germany's lack of leverage in Berlin and by forcing him to choose between rigid support for the QA or a "reasonable" position on control of terrorism. [REDACTED]

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10. Moscow might also have calculated that the challenge had the potential to create political problems for Kohl during an election campaign. He is already under fire by the opposition SPD for an unimaginative German policy. Moscow must indeed have been cheered early on by public assertions by senior SPD opposition politicians--principally Egon Bahr--that the current passport issue could have been solved, essentially on GDR terms. Thus, from Moscow's view, the current challenge in a single stroke promised to bring discomfort to Kohl while permitting the SPD to line up on the side of the "angels," in opposition to the CDU and its US "sponsor." Furthermore, while not threatening to cut off the intra-German dialogue so important to the East Germans, the challenge enhanced the importance of the SPD as East Germany's principal interlocutor. [REDACTED]

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Moscow's West European Policy and the Berlin Question

11. Under Gorbachev the Soviets have emphasized to the West Europeans that they share a common home--with continental interests apart from those of the United States. Moscow, however, remains aware that the Berlin question is a two-edged sword and that if allowed to develop into a crisis tends to solidify NATO in defense of the status quo. By emphasizing "technical" issues during the challenge rather than fundamental principles governing Berlin's unique status, East Germany sought to avoid a crisis while attempting to undermine NATO's position on movement within Berlin. In the past such "technical" challenges have indeed caused disarray in NATO. Doubtless, both the USSR and the GDR thought they had a similar chance this time to slice away at Allied claims and drive wedges in to NATO. [redacted]

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12. The current challenge has magnified the status differences between most NATO members and the three NATO occupying powers. The latter were initially "exempted" from the new passport controls, thus creating awkward "hierarchies" for NATO. Travel hardships were greatest for "non-exempt" NATO members--those who traditionally have had little stake or input in codifying the technical rites embodying the "Berlin theology." Meanwhile Moscow's intercession to exempt US, British, and French personnel from the use of passports was portrayed by the Soviets as a reasonable attempt to find a compromise that would uphold respect for the QA--but one which, nevertheless, would underscore Moscow's position on GDR sovereignty within the divided city. [redacted]

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13. The challenge also has reminded the West Germans how uniquely vulnerable they are in Berlin. Indeed, since the GDR actions some prominent West Germans have advocated the use of passports for "identification" purposes only, illustrating the extent to which some elements in the FRG view their Berlin interests as divergent from those of the three Allied powers. The challenge also reminded the three powers how vulnerable they are to an Eastern probe designed to divide them from Bonn. With the advantage of hindsight, it appears that both the USSR and GDR misjudged the potential depth of a split between West Germany and the other allies over the challenge. Had either the Soviets or East Germans realized the extent of Bonn's apparent wavering, they might not have backed off so quickly or so far. [redacted]

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Implications

14. The recent Berlin access challenge apparently sought to harmonize separate Soviet and East German interests in the transcendent objective of weakening NATO solidarity over Berlin and dividing West German opinion. Moscow probably meant to provide a demonstration, for Bloc consumption, of Gorbachev's ability to dovetail competing Soviet-East European interests rather than to simply ride roughshod over East European sensibilities. [REDACTED]

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15. For the Soviets, the GDR challenge apparently combined opportunity with low risk. They probably made it clear to Honecker that any East German equities in a challenge could not threaten Moscow's broader East-West concerns. This would explain both Moscow's rather low-key backing of its ally during this challenge and Soviet efforts early on to convince the West that they were not responsible for East German actions in the GDR's "sovereign" capital. The Soviets probably also remained wary of appearing too supportive of East German assertions of sovereignty that ran counter to Moscow's own demands for increased Bloc unity on foreign policy matters. While appearing to moderate the most extreme of the GDR's original demands by securing exemptions for the three Allied powers, the Soviets still subtly reminded Washington that they retain leverage at Berlin and can create or ameliorate troubling challenges there to the West almost at will. [REDACTED]

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